DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 877 JC 010 324

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TITLE	College Online Peer Tutor Training.
PUB DATE	2000-10-00
NOTE	8p.; Paper presented at the TechEd 2000.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Colleges; *Computer Software; *Distance Education; Nontraditional Education; *Tutoring; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS	*Oakton Community College IL

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of a college online tutor training course at Oakton Community College (Illinois) that attempted to solve the difficulties of training without a loss of effective practice. The online designers had two special considerations in course construction: maintaining the pedagogical soundness of the course modules and learning the software product. Essential to the development of an online course is a very firm understanding of pedagogy by the designers. The course designers addressed the issue of pedagogical soundness by developing a lesson plan template on the department's Intranet share drive. Lesson modules were then created from the presentations in text files, which included: (1) welcome to tutoring; (2) learning theory; (3) learning style; (4) basic study skills and learning strategies; (5) critical thinking; (6) communication and active listening skills; (7) special populations--culture and learning; (8) special student populations--students with disabilities; (9) a case study; and (10) a practicum. Text material, quizzes, discussion forums and Web-site links diversified the course lessons. The lead teacher was also available for discussion and questions during the 10-week one-hour class sessions or through e-mail. Administrators believe that, with the implementation of this course, online course delivery has been standardized at the college. (JA)

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College Online Peer Tutor Training
TechEd 2000 Presentation

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The value of tutor training can be expressed in many ways; however, the greatest value is the impact and benefits for the 5,000 students who make 15,000 visits per year to receive instructional support from tutors who have consistent and standardized tutor training. The initial team-taught course, College 103 Peer Tutor Training, was a traditional classroom presentation. The course was helpful in standardizing the tutor training, but it did not help those tutors who were hired after the course or term began, or could not attend when the class was offered, or were at another campus. The development of the on-line course was an attempt to solve the difficulties of training without a loss of effective practice.

The online designers had confronting them two special considerations affecting course construction. These involved maintaining the pedagogical soundness of the course modules and learning the software product. Essential to the development of an online course is a very firm understanding of pedagogy by the designers. In the development of the peer tutoring course there was full recognition of the differences between the classroom and electronic modalities. The course designers addressed the issue of pedagogical soundness by developing a lesson plan template on the department's Intranet share drive. This offered consistency and continuity. Lesson modules were then created from the presentations in text files. The team of ten

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facilitators was encouraged to utilize the capabilities of the course management software by being more interactive and creating materials that were also visually attractive.

Secondly, course designers needed to learn the software program. The lead teacher and colleague had moderate computer skills and required some assistance from the Information Technology Department. When the college decided to support the WEBCT course software, revisions and enhancements to the course were made to take advantage of the higher level of interactivity that was available. Although this called for some research and rethinking, it has served to enhance the developers' abilities and improve the presentation of the electronic course. At this point it is important to discuss the value of a very positive relationship with the college's Information Technology department. Even those of us who have a good background in using computers, probably don't have the depth of knowledge that would be useful in fully implementing all the media and other components we might want to use. If you use a course delivery platform, the IT specialists are still valuable allies for helping to understand the labyrinth of choices and interactions available.

As demonstrated by the EXXON project at the Center for Developmental Education (Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina), the single most important contributor to a successful tutoring program is tutor training, therefore, every care was given to be responsive this data. For the past 15 years, Oakton Community College's Instructional Support Services has had a tutor training program that follows the College Reading and Learning Association's (CRLA) guidelines. Therefore, CRLA's guidelines were also integral to the construction of this course. Additionally, all of the college's tutors, including the peer tutors, have another 20 hours of group training sessions over the academic year. The ten units of the Peer Tutor-Training course were chosen to support the philosophical position of the college's learning center and to provide a relevant application knowledge base. The peer tutors take this course and engage in tutoring concurrently.

College 103 Peer Tutor Training, enables tutors to work independently through modules. Text material, quizzes, discussion forums and web site links diversify the course lessons. The lead teacher is available for discussion and clarifying any questions during the 10 week, one hour class sessions or through e-mail. Initially, the on-line course was offered as a "stand-alone" course. The tutors' evaluations of the course indicated that they wanted opportunities to discuss the lesson content and the tutoring situations that they had encountered. For that reason the course is now a "hybrid' course with the students completing their assignments on-line and a weekly meeting with the lead teacher.

A short description of each of the lessons follows:

1. **Welcome to Tutoring – tutor cycle**

   This introduction to tutoring includes a review of the learning center's ethics for tutoring, based on a system of fair and equitable service for all enrolled students and the efficient management of a tutoring session. We have used the tutor cycle, which comes out of the California Tutor Project and the work of Ross McDonald. The clarity and reasonableness of the approach serves to build good interpersonal skills patterns for the tutors.

2. **Learning Theory**

   The peer tutors have strong discipline knowledge, but few have any experience with the theoretical concepts which will help them understand how the students they meet learn. This section is an overview of the educational theorists who have influenced much of our understanding of learning. The theorists on developmental concerns are Piaget and Perry; influences on learning, Chickering; cognitive tasks, Bloom and H. Gardner; and knowledge acquisition, Gagne and Ramsden.

3. **Learning Style**

The purpose of this unit is to develop some understanding of tutors and students' individual preferences for acquiring information and how a tutor might best present information during a session. As a basis for understanding, each peer tutor engages in a review of his/her own learning preference and then develops appropriate presentation strategies for the other learning preferences.

4. **Basic Study Skills and Learning Strategies**

One of the responsibilities of all the tutors is to aid students in the fundamentals of skillful engagement in the process of learning. To achieve this we have a well-developed unit that helps peer tutors develop learning and studying skill applications for inclusion in their practice.

5. **Critical Thinking**

The approach to the unit on critical thinking is to demonstrate ways of questioning, evaluating, analyzing and reflecting on all of the subject matter and experiences that students read, see, and hear. Critical thinking takes the learner beyond straight memorization of rote facts. We consider it essential that tutors have specific grounding in the application of this principle.

6. **Communication and Active Listening Skills**

Fundamental to the practice of tutoring is good communication and active listening skills. In this unit, understanding the stages of processing auditory information, strategies for engaging in productive active listening and communication styles are discussed.

7. **Special Populations-Culture and Learning**

Our campus is very diverse; therefore, we felt it of great value for student tutors to understand the learning differences that may exist between home cultures, values, language abilities and those of our college. This unit provides an opportunity for peer tutors to

actively engage in the examination of diverse behaviors and their possible effect on student learning.

8. **Special Student Populations-Student with Disabilities**

   Tutoring techniques or strategies that are most useful to assist students with disabilities and provide equal educational opportunity are discussed in this unit. Additionally, this unit's goal is to dispel attitudinal barriers and stereotypical thinking about people with disabilities and to increase understanding of the range of abilities in the special needs population.

9. **Case Study**

   This unit presents a tutoring situation and then encourages tutors to engage in reflective techniques. The process is useful in enhancing the tutor's ability to gather information, both facts and issue/problems, use analysis as a tool for understanding perspective, application, and in devising appropriate solutions

10. **Practicum**

    The last unit is a culminating activity during which the instructor reviews students' experiences, evaluates tutoring observations and identifies a tutor's particular strengths or weakness. Additional material is provided for whatever improvement is necessary.

For the student taking courses online there is a learning curve imbedded for both content and process. The clarity of goals, instructions and assignments can't be overemphasized. The usual classroom experience of clarification and interpretive questioning is circumvented or at least delayed in electronic media. In designing a course one can not construct anything that is based on the assumption of shared knowledge in it, all components must be based on complete exposition. This is particularly true of this course in that the students are learning about educational application and concurrently needing to apply it.

As previously stated, the course designers needed the assistance of the Information Technology department. The students too are varied in their levels of computer competency and are not as computer savvy, as one would imagine. An orientation session for the on-line class is essential in assuring that all of the tutors are familiar with accessing and navigating the course elements. Time management and self-directed learning are traits that are also required for successful completion of the course.

College 103 On-line Peer Tutor Training incorporates the content material for training tutors with the added dimension and flexibility of an on-line course. The on-line Peer Tutor Training course was enhanced by using WebCT class management software to address the difficulties of offering the required amount of standardized tutor training for those who are working, hired after the new semester training was completed, or located at another campus. Tutors are able to work independently through modules. Text material, quizzes, discussion forums and web site links diversify the course lessons. The lead teacher is available for discussion and clarifying any questions during the 10 week one hour class sessions or through e-mail. The course has standardized peer tutor training. This is a small tidbit of knowledge gained from experience.

Resources

Tutoring

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